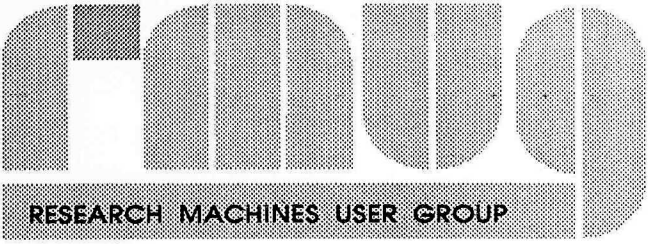
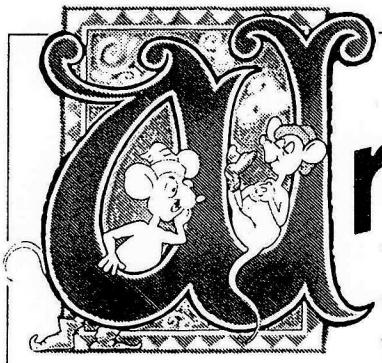
RM User

Volume 7:5

February 1993





rite On!

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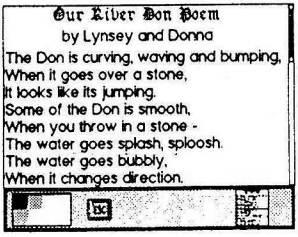
For the beginner . . .


Our River Don Poem
by Lynsey and Donna
The Don is curving, waving and bumping,
When it goes over a stone,
It looks like its jumping.
Some of the Don is smooth,
When you throw in a stone -
The water goes splash, sploosh.
The water goes bubbly,
When it changes direction.

- Full *WYSIWYG* word processing
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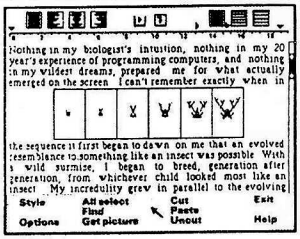
For more advanced users . . .


Nothing in my biologist's intuition, nothing in my 20 year's experience of programming computers, and nothing in my wildest dreams, prepared me for what actually emerged on the screen. I can't remember exactly when in
the sequence it first began to dawn on me that an evolved resemblance to something like an insect was possible. With a wild surmise, I began to breed, generation after generation, from whichever child looked most like an insect. My incredulity grew in parallel to the evolving
Style
All select
Find
Get picture
Cut
Paste
Unout
Exit
Options
Help

- Variable margins and tab stops
- Formatting ruler display
- Include page breaks and footers
- Easy-to-use foreign accents
- Short cuts with function or CTRL keys

Nimbus or IBM £39 + VAT Nimbus network or IBM site licence £109 + VAT
(IBM requires colour EGA graphics)

SPA

PO BOX 59, Tewkesbury,
Gloucestershire GL20 6AB
Telephone (0684) 81700 FAX (0684) 81718

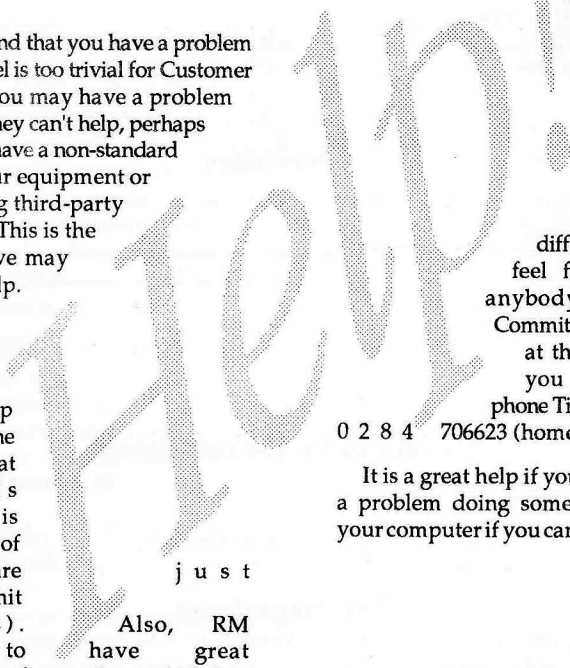
HelpLine

The User Group exists to help its members use the computers which they have.

Many of you (about 20%) are home users of Nimbus computers and we would like to help you. Mary Mabey is a home user who has kindly agreed to let us publish her phone number; you may call her at home on 081 698 7573 if you want some advice on using your computer.

You may find that you have a problem which you feel is too trivial for Customer Support or you may have a problem with which they can't help, perhaps because you have a non-standard setup for your equipment or you are using third-party equipment. This is the time when we may be able to help.

Remember that you can telephone the User Group members in the evening or at weekends when RM is shut (and, of course, you are just bound to hit problems). Also, RM don't claim to have great knowledge of products which they don't producesuch as Excel or PageMaker. They can tell you how to install the packages on their equipment and how to get started but they cannot be expected to give you in depth support on using the packages. We, on the other hand, can. Most of the people whose phone numbers are listed at the back are using the contents of the educational software library on a daily basis. We may have met exactly the problem you have just encountered.



If you are in difficulty, please feel free to ring anybody on the Committee (numbers at the back) and you may also phone Tim Phillips on 0284 706623 (home number).

It is a great help if you are having a problem doing something using your computer if you can be next to it

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Two magazines?

For a trial period we are sending two magazines to those people who have paid the standard £15 subscription. We are hoping that you will give the spare copy to a colleague who might be interested in joining so that they can see some of what the User Group has to offer. Please let the membership secretary know if you do not want to receive a second copy (write to RMUG, Freepost, London W12 0BR or phone 081 740 5642)

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News and Editorial

I've just been to BETT, which this year moved to Olympia. If you've never heard of it, it's the biggest technology exhibition aimed at education with exhibitors from computer hardware and software fields as well as all sorts of activities related to what might loosely be called technology in the curriculum. If you couldn't make it this year then do look out for it next year; it's on from 12-15 January 1994, again at Olympia.

RM again had a big stand there but this year they were right by the door so that you couldn't miss them. There was a lot of interest shown by visitors in the systems on display; the one of most interest to me was RM Net LM v1.1; see elsewhere in the magazine for comments on this; but they were also showing the new S Series 486SX and DX computers running on the network. By the time you read this the new prices will have taken effect (due on 1 February). As an example, a PC486 25MHz machine with 4Mb RAM, 80MB drive and Super VGA colour monitor costs £949 and the same price is charged for a network interface in place of the hard and floppy drive. A quick look at ICL's catalogue reveals that this is the same as they charge but remember that RM's price also includes support for PC186 applications, a licence for RM Basic, BBC Basic and RM Logo.

I think that RM have cleared up what you pay for with a network station; the new price list says "All stations include the Windows Educational Workstation licence allowing access to all the resources and facilities of the RM Network server". Note, also, that there is now only one station type; the multi-protocol boot ROM means that the same machine is used on Net 3.1, Netware and Net LM.

There are some reductions in the price of "bits and pieces"; the lowest specification monitor now sold is Super VGA colour but at the same price as the old VGA monitor (£200), a non-interlaced monitor costs £270 and a 17" monitor costs £650. Note that all these meet or exceed the Health and Safety specifications which have been in force since 1 January for new equipment. Memory for S Series machines comes as standard SIMMs which means for the first time ever that RM's prices are reasonable; about £30 per megabyte (compared to the PC286 where memory still costs £55 for 1Mb, the X Series where it costs £65 or the PC186 where you pay a staggering £39 for just half a megabyte!)

One of the new packages on display was Investigate. This is a Windows based data-logging and control package aimed at pupils in Key Stages 1-3. It works with interfaces from Philip Harris, Sense and Control and LogIT amongst others with no special setting up and allows you, for example, to set up a digital thermometer. The output of this is then connected to a graph so that temperature is recorded against time on the graph. There is a range of sensors which can be used with the package and they are simply "wired" together on screen to give whatever system you require. There are gates available which open, for example, when the light level is greater than a certain level and then cause something else to happen. It looks very easy to

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use and, in common with Starting Grid and Excel, can be setup for pupils at four levels of complexity giving lots of possibilities for use. It will run on any machine with Windows 3, including the PC186. Collected data can also be fed into Excel (including the Starting Grid version) and it costs £79 (or £49 if you order before 26 February).

At Primary level, the Window Box has been provided with the Sassoon Primary typeface for all the Windows programs (this is designed to be easier to read than some of the standard computer fonts, looking much more like the hand printed text with which children will be familiar). Window Box costs £1199 for a PC386 with 80Mb drive, 4Mb of RAM, colour monitor, First Word for Windows, Excel Starting Grid, Clipboard database, Sketch, Art + Time and RM Logo.

This is RM's 15th year as a supplier of computer equipment to education and to mark this they are holding one day conferences in Manchester, Bristol, Birmingham and London during March. The conferences are sponsored by Microsoft and will look at a wide range of issues; they are not just aimed at IT co-ordinators but also senior managers in order to give them some understanding of the strategic issues which are involved in implementing IT. If you've not yet received details (and 5 sets have reached me!) then contact School Sales on 0235 826868.

RM start 1993 with confirmation that they are the number one company in the education market. Computer Weekly's UK IT market Analysis for Autumn 1992 shows RM with a revenue of just over £50m; Acorn has £35m, Apple £32m and IBM £23m. (ICL have an education revenue of just £2.2m putting them 16th in the list)

BETT always gives an opportunity to see some of the resources which I've never seen advertised (or perhaps I've seen the advert but it didn't catch my attention). Some of these are excellent. The Centre for Statistical Education has a range of four booklets covering the use of Databases and Spreadsheets in History, Mathematics, Science and Geography. These cost just £4.50 each, including postage; contact Lynne Cosford on 0742 768555 ext 4117 or write to her at the University of Sheffield, Sheffield S3 7RH with a cheque payable to the University of Sheffield.

I was particularly on the lookout for software which runs on the PC186. It's now 8 years since this computer was launched (at the predecessor exhibition to BETT) and it's good to see that some companies are still producing new software for it. Sherston Software (Swan Barton, Sherston, Malmesbury, Wiltshire, SN16 0LH Tel: 0666 840433) have a range of new programs. Crystal Rain Forest is a logo based adventure aimed at 8-13 year olds which looks like great fun. Sellardore Tales is an adventure intended to have a reading age of 8 but a content level suitable for 11-12 year olds. For science, Zillion provides a variety of activities in which they have to rearrange the solar system. One of the impressive things about Sherston's software (and that of SPA mentioned below) is its pricing; Sherston charge just twice the price of a single copy for a primary site licence and three times the price for a secondary site. This is far better than many companies who charge outrageous amounts for site or network licences.

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Software Production Associates (SPA) have supported RM computers since the days of the 380z and continue to produce good software. Their latest package is SPA works or SPARKS. This is an integrated database and spreadsheet which can also import pictures from PaintSPA. As with PaintSPA, NewSPAper and Write On, the menus are simple words at the bottom of the screen, easily used with keyboard or mouse. In common with programs like Microsoft Works it's possible to enter data in a card format and then switch to a table or spreadsheet view. Unlike Works, however, it's possible not only to give names to areas but to use them by typing formulae like *average of weight*. Maths formulae are written just as you would on paper, rather than introducing the brackets which most systems require (eg sin x rather than SIN(X) and it is possible to show formulae and the numbers which go into them in different colours so that the difference between a calculation and the data going into it is obvious (and, as far as I can tell, not even Excel 4 can do that automatically). SPARKS allows multiple windows on screen (but it's not a Windows package so its speed is fine on a PC186) and allows data to be imported from a wide range of other packages (great if you have access to a data file in one package but feel that a nicer "front end" is really needed for your pupils). SPARKS costs just £59 for one copy or £179 for a 16 user licence. SPA are on 0684 81700.

On the subject of data handling, Anglia TV have announced more support for Key Plus. One of the great strengths of Key and Key Plus has been the range of datafiles available for use with them. I won't fill pages by describing all of them but there are files for use in Science, Geography, History and Natural History. Many of the files will work with Key on the PC186 as well as Key Plus on the other RM machines. A new addition this year is the availability of some datasets on CD ROM, including 19th century biographies, Human Biology, Countries of the World and Counties of Britain. Finally, there is a huge range of clipart available on topics appropriate for schools. The pictures are in Windows metafile format which means they can be read by Word for Windows and PageMaker amongst others.

ILECC is another company which has supported RM computers for years and continues to do so. All Write version 2 has recently been released and continues to be the best multilingual word processor available (and if you've never seen it, multilingual doesn't just mean that it can handle a few accents but also a range of languages using a non-Roman character set such as Arabic, Bengali, Tamil and Urdu to name a few). Developing Tray is now available with a set of History datafiles, allowing simple investigation of a range of primary data sources. Window Box is a version of Mail Box that runs under Windows and gives easy access to an e-mail system for RM Networks. You can not just send simple messages but also any kind of file can be despatched and it looks ideal, particularly for teaching about e-mail. Elsewhere in the magazine you will find a review of the new guide to Superbase but ILECC also have a new guide for Word for Windows to deal with version 2 of the program. ILECC are at John Ruskin Street, London SE5 0PQ Tel: 071 735 9123.

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HiDES (the Historical Documents Expert System) is a project developed at the University of Southampton to help with the critical methods needed in historical investigation and the study of primary sources. In brief, the system presents a resource for study, asks questions on it, accepts free form text input and then uses an expert system to analyse and mark this response. I'm not a historian but the idea looked brilliant. For more information contact The HiDES Project, The History Department, The University of Southampton, Southampton, SO9 5NH. Tel: 0703 593079.

Still in an historical frame of mind, The Times has launched a CD ROM called Changing Times which contains selections of news from the past 200 years covering areas such as The French and Russian Revolutions, the First and Second World Wars, Women's Rights and many more. Given the increasing importance of access to primary and secondary sources in history, this looks like an excellent idea. Details from The Times Network Systems, Priory House, St John's Lane, London, EC1M 4HD Tel: 071-782 7104.

British Telecom is one of those companies which, while having nothing directly to do with education, tries very hard to support it. Their latest package is called Priority and aims to support National Curriculum Technology Te5 (or whatever it's called when you read this). The program models the decisions taken by the manager of a group of BT engineers. Pupils take the place of the manager and have to allocate jobs on the basis of skills available, distance to the job and importance of the job. I can't really do the package justice in a short paragraph but it looks like a good idea; more details from BT Education Service, PO Box 10, Wetherby, West Yorkshire, LE23 7EL. Tel: 0937 844443. (Incidentally, why is that when BT are always advertising how good Freephone and Linkway services are for other industries, they do not use them for this?)

Essex County Council has a set of 10 posters showing ideas for using Excel. They are A3 in size, printed in 2 colours and laminated for protection and cost just £15 per set. Contact NE Essex CDC, Acacia Avenue, Colchester, CO4 3TQ Tel: 0206 863839.

Resource's catalogue includes a series of charts showing how their software fits into the various National Curriculum areas; they have packages for English, Maths, Science, History, Geography and Technology and for Key Stages 1 to 4. Some of their software is not available for the Nimbus but that which is can be used on the PC186 as well as the others. For more details contact Resource at Exeter Road, Wheatley, Doncaster, DN2 4PY Tel: 0302 340331.

The Advisory Unit is another long established centre offering support to users of RM equipment. A pack I've not seen before is the Modelling Pack which contains a huge range of resources to help teachers implement computer based modelling in Science, Maths, Geography and Business Education. Aegis stands for An Educational Geographic Information System and allows you to combine vector maps with data from spreadsheets or databases. This gives the facility to interrogate and present data very easily and allows study of all kinds to take place. The package is available for the full Nimbus range (it runs under

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Windows 3 so the range of colours is limited on the PC186) and later this year will be available on CD ROM with a much increased range of maps and data (this version will not be available for the PC186). Details from AU Enterprises Ltd, 126 Great North Road, Hatfield Road, Hertfordshire, AL9 5JZ Tel: 0707 266714.

STORM have a range of packages available for children learning Maths and English in Key Stages 1 and 2. The programs are not available for the PC186 but work well on the other machines. Again, they have sensible pricing for site use; programs are typically £18 to £30 each with site licences available at just twice that price. Contact them at Coachman's Quarters, Digby Road, Sherborne, Dorset, DT9 3NN.

Microsoft have just announced a new pricing strategy for education. Previously the only way of buying 50 copies of Excel was to buy a 50 pack with 50 sets of discs and 50 manuals. Many schools do not need that many manuals so the new system brings in Microsoft Licence Paks (MLP) which give you the software but no manual. You can also buy flexible quantities of any piece of software (previously there were fixed size packs) so you can buy a 10 MLP and 3 single MLPs to give you 13 licences. The major applications (Access, Excel, FoxPro, PowerPoint and Word) are each £145 for a standard single copy or £85 for the single MLP with discounts for quantity. Publisher and Works for Windows are just £50 for an MLP. If you are starting from scratch then buying Microsoft Office gives you Word, Excel and PowerPoint for just £145 so even if you only need two of the packages this is a very good buy. The only product that doesn't come with much of a reduction in price is Windows itself; the MLP is £40 but as all RM computers come with a licence for Windows that doesn't really matter. If you want more details then contact Microsoft on 0734 270000 or talk to a Microsoft Education Specialist Centre (such as EdHitec on 0423 871027)

CD ROM continues to look interesting. Just before Christmas I attended the On Line Information exhibition at Olympia. The sheer quantity of information available either on CD or on-line is absolutely daunting. Much of the stuff at the show was aimed at people with very big purses such as companies or university libraries but there were some smaller companies producing material of interest to schools or individuals. Attica Cybernetics was showing a range of titles and had information on some titles which are due for release soon. The original CD ROM of Hutchinson's Encyclopedia has now been replaced by a multi-media version with much more information, lots of photographs and many sound recordings. It costs £149 for a single licence or £399 for a 16 user network licence. Not shown but looking interesting on paper was the Attica Writers Reference Bookshelf comprising an encyclopedia, dictionary, quotations, thesaurus and other reference information. This costs £79 for a single copy. A disc to support history at key stages 3 and 4 is the World War II archives. This includes newspaper cuttings, photographs and sound recordings, giving access to original source material. This should now be available and costs £149. If you want more information then Attica is running a series of local

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seminars or you can call them on 0865 791346 to ask for the free Attica Essential Guide to CD ROM. Still on CD ROM, Microsoft have announced a multi-media encyclopedia called Encarta; this is "available in April 93" and will cost £299 or £149 to education.

Selectamark make a security marking system which effectively "etches" 2 lines of information on your expensive equipment. You are provided with a set of stencils and compounds which will permanently mark glass, plastic, wood and aluminium. The marking is impossible to remove without seriously damaging the surface of the equipment and should deter thieves. If you have problems with theft then this is well worthwhile trying. It costs 60p per stencil for quantities of less than 1000, falling to 38p for more than 10000. It seems expensive but if it prevents just one computer at £1000 going missing then it has to be worth it. Contact Selectmark at The Gatehouse, 5 Locks Court, 429 Crofton Road, Locksbottom, Kent, BR6 8NL Tel: 0689 860757 (and if that isn't an appropriate address for a security company then I don't know what is!)

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Letters to the Editor

I write as a teacher of Information Technology using a network of 186 computers. There is a network of 286 computers in another room.

I would like to start a discussion and sharing of ideas regarding the IT curriculum. More often than not we have to read reviews of machines and software that I will never see. I am not responsible for the network, there is very little money to buy any of these excellent and expensive applications I see in the PC computer magazines. Anyhow, they wouldn't run on the 186's. Rather, we are limited by the RM network already installed. In my part of the country there seems to be a dearth of curriculum support, that is, ideas for making the teaching of IT vital and interesting. The magazine rarely publishes ideas in this field. An example of the sort of thing I have in mind was printed in the 'TES' this last month. Useful idea number one was to imagine you were going to an exotic place on a holiday and then to use a spread sheet to keep the baggage within the airline's luggage allowance. A second idea, that involved spending money on extra software, was to compare the living allowances of two Victorian families; a rich one and a poor one. Again, a spreadsheet was involved. Occasionally I glean ideas from old books I find buried on a shelf, usually the ideas have to come from my own imagination. Often, we work in tandem with another department, at the moment two years are using the French characters available in Word for Windows to produce illustrated menus and letters in French. This has been quite successful. On the other hand, unlike the exciting and glowing newspaper reports I read, I have found desk top publishing difficult. The reasons for this seem to be two fold. Firstly, the programs have a steep learning curve: we have abandoned 'Newspaper' for this reason, and, secondly, the lower ability students have difficulty in typing in the words accurately and fluently. We are now using a program called 'Newsmaster 2'. It is fairly primitive compared with the likes of Page Maker, but it has access to a substantial clip art, it is able to reproduce many of the sophisticated functions of an expensive program and it is intuitive in many ways.

I have found the RMUG magazine quite useful in the occasional article that delves into the likes of Word for Windows in a specialised way. I often have a question that is not readily answered by looking at the help feature and the manual has always been borrowed by someone. For example, I am trying to find out how to produce a bullet point. However, having worked out how to do something like this, I then have a second hurdle: how to effectively relay that information to the students. I recently worked out that they had to go through twenty steps from signing on to signing off, and that was without actually making any progress with their work. This is an awesome feat for many of these people who are not computer freaks and find the process an incomprehensible mystery. One solution I have used is to distil the steps into a, hopefully, easy to read format. I include an example of such a sheet that attempts to summarize one process in

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'PageMaker'.

One potentially key curriculum area that is that of 'Control'. To be quite frank, we have done next to nothing in this area since the old BBC computers were replaced with the RM machines. How does one use a RM machine for Control in a class room context? Lots of money I suspect. Perhaps we'll finish up borrowing back those old BBCs to introduce Control later this academic year! There is a useful article in December's 'Acorn User' magazine about this.

So, in conclusion, may I ask for some more ideas from teachers on how to make IT teaching better. More ideas from teachers who have successfully integrated IT across the curriculum, and, finally, how to use the standard RM issue applications in a class situation.

Finally, a technical problem I have not seen mentioned in your pages is the problem of printing out files from 'Windows Paintbrush' on a one megabyte machine. The computer reports insufficient memory. I have muddled through on this one by either: pasting into a word processor or, by converting it to a lower resolution monochrome bitmap picture. Loading PCX pictures has the same effect, the smaller picture size allows printing.

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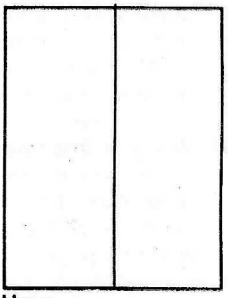
Using PageMaker 3.01 to place a picture in the middle of a two column page

Double click on Page Maker
FILE: NEW
Switch off double sided ☒ Double-sided and choose ◉ A4 A 4 size paper then click OK
Now select Options Column Guides, delete the 1 and type 2



To get the writing:

Your writing should be saved as a Write file
Choose FILE PLACE
Find the writing that you saved
Double click on its name
When the icon appears move it to the top left and click
To enlarge the view, click the right mouse button

Text Flow: the writing will not automatically flow into the second column. If you see a + sign in the "handle" at the bottom of the first column, click on it and then click at the top of the second column.

To get the picture:

Choose FILE:PLACE
Click on the drive where your picture is stored
Find your picture and double click on it. Wait for the icon to change.
Move to where you want the picture and click

Changing the text wrap:

OPTIONS: TEXT WRAP
Click the middle box then OK
Adjust the frame to fit the picture

Save and print your work

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In rushing to read the last edition I found I couldn't resist your plea to hear from members with computers at home. I have one major item concerning the future of PC186s. I've looked through back copies and although you addressed a number of specific issues relating to 186s it seems the right time to look at the overall picture. Having found out that RM have discontinued the line and being the owner of a 2 year old one I wondered if your team could put their minds to two questions.

1 Is there a future for the 186 and could a balance sheet be drawn up to outline the situation for current owners?
2 Where is that future? In other words, where is the market for those of us who wish to sell our machines and purchase more modern equipment?

Like many people- a recent survey of yours showed many of them exist in private homes - I purchased mine a couple of years ago for a large amount of money and now find them worth about 1/3 of the purchase price, though I accept that other machines have fallen in price. It is also irritating to go to the annual BETT show and find that little new material is available for them. Whilst appreciating your comments recently concerning the price of RM's new 386/486s and your hope that they would become much more competitive, I don't appear to have seen much movement. Have you heard any further news of reductions because I would like to stay with RM, not least because of the worthwhile and widespread support of your committee.

Bob Jeffrey.

The future of the 186 depends on who is using it. In a school with a number of computers then the 186 will continue to be useful for simple word processing and so on while newer machines are used elsewhere (in the same way that 480z computers are still being used long after many people thought they would have died!) For a home user this is not possible; few homes can afford multiple computers

In this month's news section I've written about some of the software I found at BETT which runs on the PC186. Some of it may not be as exciting or powerful as that for the later machines but it's nonetheless useable.

Although RM put a lot of work into getting Windows 3 to run on the 186 they will never be able to make Windows 3.1 run (it needs a minimum of a 286 chip). Of the major Windows software released during the past year almost all of it either needs Windows 3.1 or runs only in Standard or Enhanced mode. This means that you will never be able to use the newer packages on a 186. Does this matter? If, for example, you want to do word processing then something like FlexiWrite is quite capable and works well on the 186. For a more powerful package, Microsoft Word v3 does not have all the bells and whistles of Word for Windows but it does a pretty good job. I used a PC186 to edit this magazine for two years; it was quite slow but it did do the job.A problem that won't go away is the fact that hi-tech equipment seems to be obsolete almost as soon as you have bought and it drops in value (because a newer machine has replaced it) In practice it may well be useable for much longer.

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One market for second hand 186s may be schools; some schools will not be able to afford new machines but may be able to find the money to buy one or two second hand computers to add to existing machines (although a problem here is that if the machines are on a network then the cost of adding a network card to a computer costs almost as much as the machine is worth).

Some companies are producing new software for the PC186; Sherston's new catalogue reached me this week (see news section for more details) and SPA have a good range of software available for all RM's machines. There is also a steady trickle of conversions from the BBC model B although few of these are likely to be really exciting.

In summary, what you do with the PC186 depends on who you are. If you are at home and want to be able to use new Windows applications then you will have to get rid of the 186. If you are happy working with older software then keep hold of it. They were well made and shouldn't wear out for a good while yet. If you are in a school then you have to consider using the 186s for less demanding tasks, such as running CAL software (often written directly for the 186 or using BBC Basic) or possibly even using them for control; fitting a user port gives a reasonable machine for control purposes and a package like Logicator will work on the 186.

One suggestion I've received is that RM should offer trade in deals for the PC186. I've been told that they won't do this because they couldn't do anything with the computers they bought in this way so would simply be giving an extra discount to the user and then throwing away the traded in machines. What do you think? Perhaps if enough people tell RM that this would be a good idea we will see something happen.

Please let me know if you have any thoughts on the future of the 186. A lot of them are still in use; what are you doing with them?

I read the comments in the last magazine about problems with running Key Plus on a network. The only difficulty we have experienced with it on RM Net LM was that multiple users could not access the same datafile on drive P:. This, apparently, is a known "feature" of version 1.02 and is fixed in version 1.12; phone the technical support hotline on 061 476 5553 for details.

I do have a couple of misgivings about the program, however. It seems to be impossible to change the type of a field once it has been defined. Also, it is not possible to locate a record by typing in the contents of a field; instead you must go to a particular record number (unlike Superbase). To some extent this is nit picking since the statistical display facilities are superb.

Changing the subject, I have a few items of software written over the last few years which may be of use to others. These allow conversion of files from GRASS to FIF, GRASS to CSV, CSV to Quest and a few others. Some of these are not totally robust but if they do the job you need then please contact me.

Glenn Taylor, 1 Frayne Road, Ashton, Bristol, BS3 1RU

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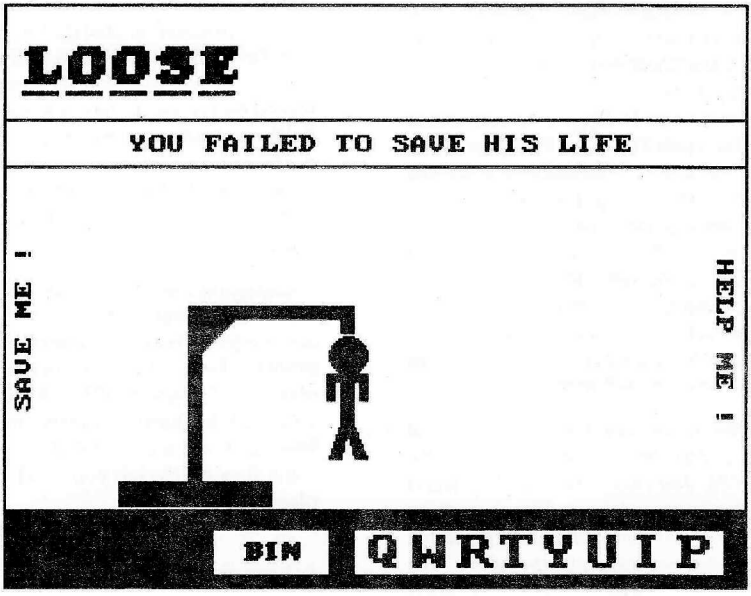
Hangman

Steve Rochford

This is a computerised version of the classic Hangman game. It's written in RM Basic and will run on any RM machine and is happy on RM networks (both Net 3 and RM Net LM). It's suitable both for use in school for helping people to spell (provided that they have some idea what the words are) or just for fun.

Once the program has loaded you are shown a title screen and asked to press a key; nothing special here - many programs show you a title screen before they start but this one is there for a reason. With many games which pick from a "random" list there is always a problem that running them on a network will give adjacent screens with identically ordered sets of words. Waiting for the user to press a key means that there is a truly random wait before the game starts and the random start time is used to make sure that the words should appear in a different order on each computer.

The starting screen gives you a menu of choices, the first of which is to play the game. Choosing this asks you to pick a set of words and then the game screen is drawn. This contains a space for the word(s) at the top with dashes showing where the letters go, a gallows in the middle and a space at the bottom where letters will go which you pick but are not in the word. Playing the game is straightforward; you press the letters, if a letter is correct then it appears on screen in the correct place, otherwise it goes in the bin and a bit is added to the man on the gallows. If you get the



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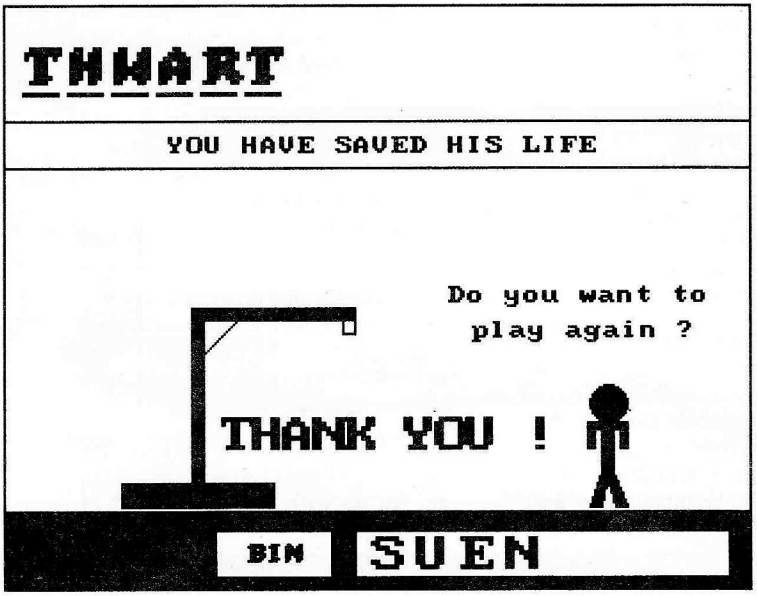
word right then the man gets down from the gallows and walks away, if not then he dies. After the game is over you are asked if you want to play again (provided that there are unused words left; the game will not use the same word twice) and it keeps track of your score.

The other main part to the program is an editor. This allows you to create a new list of words for the game or to edit an existing list. You could use any text editor but this has a few nice touches such as checking for duplicates and sorting the list into alphabetical order. It will also let you merge files, delete words from the list or print out the list. You can also search for a word (so that you can see if you have already used it). This last may sound trivial but one of the lists supplied is over 600 words long. The search allows you to just type in the first few letters of a word. It is possible to use words from the editor without first saving them and you can also reset the score to use the same set of words again.

In conclusion, a simple program which does what it sets out to do competently. It's available from Sharrad Software at 10 Gainsborough Hill, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 1ST Tel: (0491 577149)



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More Mouse Droppings from Ackworth.

David Palmer

I have listened to our science people debating the new tiered-entry testing methods and they managed to get themselves to both ends of the spectrum. One is going to enter his students at the lowest level so he is sure they will pass. The other is going to enter them as high as possible so they may distinguish themselves. Both are risking letting their students down in different ways. Now we are approaching a point where we have to do the same for our students I wonder if there is anyone who can offer any positive argument for the proposed system. If not then can anyone suggest how we may best make our voices heard in protest??

It may also be useful to share ways of checking the criteria that we need to consider. I have printed a list of attainment targets (without describing them as such) and I give a copy to each student before a reporting interval and ask them to write down what they feel about them. They also write a report on themselves and are usually far more critical than I am. I think these are documents which will be useful entries for their profile folders.

When using RMNetLM, or even other nets, I think it may prove very useful to have some other admin IDs. I have edited myself out of contact with the network and been able to use an alter ego to get back in. I think three IDs is probably a good number. They are also useful for logging on to more than one machine. You can free **Admin** for multiple logons but then you wouldn't get a message if it was in use when you logon - which could be useful!!

I had a very frustrating set of messages from my AX today. In spite of having almost 4M of memory, it was giving "**Not Enough Memory To Run This Application**" messages even with everything else turrned off. It claimed it had 4M on startup, after doing **MEM** and in **About Program Manager**. The last straw was "**Unable to contact domain**" when trying to run **User Manager**. I think the problem was due to loose memory as a bit of card jiggling solved it - as suggested by Technical Support. Apparently none of the reporting methods above actually check to see if the memory is really available!

I have been to one of RM's travelling NetLM workshops which are being offered at various sites around the country and which are apparently going to be organised to happen once a term in each area. I have nothing but praise for this idea, it is definitely A Good Thing. Like RMuser gatherings, I came away with a head full of possible fixes and the reassurance that others have problems too.

I decided the other day that I would have to accept the fact that every day would bring its own network crisis and just get on with fixing them. I am sure that if I ever get it all sorted then another upgrade will appear.

Having been "nice" to RM about the workshops I feel I can fairly say that I am fed up with the hidden costs of upgrading. Last RMuser had an article by someone who had had to pay through the nose for an upgrade to his backup system. So have I and I am even madder because I was told I could go on using my "old" software. Every upgrade I have had has come up with an extra

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cost after the event. Next time I am going to ask for a written promise that this won't happen again. If you are looking to move up, please think about this angle.

Some little adjustments I have made to my workspaces have been useful to me and I pass them on in case they help anyone else. On the server I have created icons in the **Main Group** window which are called "**Console**", "**Who**", "**Log Stop**" and "**Log Start**". Double clicking on the first will call up the secure console screen with a password built in. I think this is much safer than having to type in a password every time with the risk of mistyping or someone seeing what you type. "**Who**" simply performs **Net Who** but is quicker and "**Log Stop**" performs **Net Stop Netlogon**" when we have "**User Already Logged On**" problems and "**Log Start**" restarts the service. When logged on at a station, I have used **Setup Program Manager** to reduce the **Monitoring** and **Auditing** windows to icons since they can cause problems if run while the network is busy. Apparently it is better to do this sort of work at the server. I have three windows open - **Accessories, Change the Network** and **Help**. I have also set the wallpaper to Brick which is very striking and reminds me that a station is logged on as **Admin**. I have renamed the icons in **Change the Network** to single words - sometimes compound - so they are easier to identify. They are now called **Users, Stations, Applications, Printers, SetupProgman, DeleteShare** etc. In **Accessories** I have added **MSDOS.EXE** (a faster file manager) **Paintshop Pro** (very useful), **Winword** and **Winone** (**Word for Windows 1**). I wish I could set **Winone** to save its **INI** as **Winone.INI** so that both programs were not fighting over the same file!!

Something I have failed to do (any tips?) is to get one station to load a scanner driver. I have worked on **CONFIG.SYS** for the station but to no avail.

I am convinced that we are entering new ground with the current software because we have passed the point where any one person understands the whole thing. People become expert on bits but the whole was produced by a team rather than an individual. This is one of the reasons why it is the companies who can afford to pay for a team who are taking over.

Entries for Heroes & Villains database:- CPC (0772 555034) are heroes for providing very cheap kit and components and mousemats etc and getting it on your desk the next day. Whoever came up with the tiered-entry testing is a villain in my book!

Lastly, I am intrigued by the possibilities of using **Word's** spelling checker as a sort of I Ching. It threw up Appalling Appellant as suggestions for Applelink and Nettle for NetLM.

If I can give more details for any of the above, please call **0977 615225** or e-mail to **100021,3420 (Compuserve)** or **ACKWORTH.SCH (Applelink)**

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RM User Group

The Annual General Meeting
will take place
on
Saturday 27 March 1993
at
the Inner London Educational
Computing Centre
John Ruskin Street
London
SE5 0PQ

Further details will be sent to you
nearer the date or are available from
the Secretary, John Williams

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Technical Tips

Stephen D. Sharrad

In this months tech tips I will hopefully explain some more Tips about Technical things (Tip Techs?)

Command Your Space

In the continuing saga of Command Interpreters, we will discuss another interesting characteristic of Command.Com.

You may be familiar with the term "Environment Space." DOS uses this relatively small amount of memory to store what are called Environment Parameters. You may be familiar with these as path, prompt or comspec settings or any other piece of information which is displayed when SET is typed at the DOS prompt. An example of this would be:

```
A\>SET <Enter>
PATH=a:\bob;a:\real\fedup
PROMPT=$p$g
COMSPEC=a:\command.com
STARTUP=my_disk
MYNAME=Bogus
```

The PATH setting is to suggest to the computer where it might find an application if it is not in the current directory. So, if you entered BIGAPP at the prompt (drivename then arrow >) but if the application (this can be a file with a BATch, COMmand or EXEcutable extension) was not in the current directory the PATH environment setting says "Okay, try the A:\BOB directory" and then if it finds the file, it runs it. It will then try the next directory listed under PATH, which is separated by a semi-colon (;).

To set a path, you can either use SET PATH=<pathname>;<pathname>..... or just do PATH=<pathname> etc. Similarly, just typing PATH <Enter> displays a path if there is one, or "No Path."

Now we come to the PROMPT parameter. Normally, the DOS prompt is just a plain old boring drivename-arrow (e.g. A>) but if you have numerous directories which you are continuously swapping between you can easily loose your place and you may have to keep on typing CD to find out just where you in the directory structure. This can become incredibly tedious so a good idea is to use the PROMPT setting. This changes what your DOS prompt looks like. Set it just like the PATH setting but, of course, change to PROMPT. So now you could have this:

```
A >PROMPT=Hello Everybody!
```

And this will change your DOS prompt to Hello Everybody! Not incredibly useful as you now loose what drive you are on. This is where PROMPT's special parameters come in. These are preceded by a dollars sign, $. (I've always wanted to be rich.) These are some of the most commonly used PROMPT symbols:

$p Displays path
$g Displays forward arrow (>)
$_ Carriage return
$v Displays DOS version
$d Displays Date
$t Displays Time
$b Pipe (|) symbol
$l Displays backward arrow <<>
$n Default Drive
$s Space (Leading Only. e.g. If you did "PROMPT $s $s Hi Guys!" this

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would produce

<two spaces>Hi Guys

instead of a "PROMPT<two spaces>Hi Guys!" which would only produce

Hi Guys!

$e Gets DOS ready for escape sequence, we might discuss these some time in the future. (On anything but a PC186, ANSI.SYS needs to be installed. $e is actually an shorthand for the code X"1B").

So, you could have PROMPT=Hello All RMUsers, the time is t_I'm using $v at the directory of pg

This would display something like

Hello All RMUsers, the time is 12:33:55.34

I'm using MSDOS Version 3.1 at the directory of A:\TEMP>

Experiment with PROMPT, but don't make the PROMPTs too long, the above is a bit of an overkill. The really good news is however that you can always reset the PROMPT by just entering PROMPT <Enter>

The COMSPEC is something very much to do with Command.Com. In a previous article we found out how that some programs, like Command.Com are TSR's, or Terminate Stay Resident programs. However, so applications like SETPC overwrite part of Command.Com in memory and it reloads Command.Com. How does it know how to do this? Well, when Command is loaded it is split into two parts, the resident part and the transient part. The computer never forgets the resident part but SETPC usually overwrites the transient part, so the resident part makes the computer reload Command.Com. This is okay but what happens if you don't have a copy of command in the directory from where something like SETPC is loaded? Networks (and really also standalone systems) cannot afford to have numerous copies of Command.Com everywhere as this makes it very easy for hackers. (Networks that use BBCBASIC suffer this problem very much. During BBCBASIC, a user may press CTRL-BREAK and then *COMMAND and get to DOS. What you can do is make the resident part of Command look somewhere else for Command.Com by setting the COMSPEC environment parameter. The COMSPEC parameter only takes one operand (or setting) and this is the pathname and programname of Command.Com. So you could do

```
C:\>SET COMSPEC=
  C:\DOS\COMMAND.COM
```

This not only changes where Command.Com is to be found but you can also rename Command.Com. This is similar to the SHELL parameter in CONFIG.SYS but, with this, be careful that you do not make it so that on boot-up you get a "Bad or Missing Command Interpreter) error (e.g. You specified a filename or pathname that does not exist, or the program could not be run as a shell.)

The COMSPEC parameter is also extremely useful for single-disk systems which, say load SETPC off a ramdisk. You can copy Command.Com to the ramdisk but it will still look only at drive A until the compsec parameter is set to look at the ramdisk (SETPC requires Command.Com because 80% of the

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time SETPC loads it overwrites the transient part of Command.Com in memory (the resident part of Command.Com enforces the re-loading of itself. When Command is loaded, it is loaded in two parts, one of which is more easily "forgotten" by the computer than the other).

DOS' Environment space can be used for storing pieces of information in between batch files or for things like password routines. To store a piece of information, just give a string (a parameter) a value. Spaces, however, cannot be included in any of these, except for the PROMPT command. To separate text, use something like this:

```
C:\>set toget=what_has_the_
  effect_of_spacing_use_the_
  underline_character.
```

If you have the WHAT Batch File Enhancer Utility (supplied on some newer RM equipment with harddisks including PC186 PC40's), you could construct a simple password routine like this:

```
CONFIG.SYS
SHELL=c:\command.com /p /c
  passrun.bat
```

To construct the following batch file, use COPY CON at the DOS prompt or use a word-processor and save in text format with the .BAT extension.

```
PASSRUN.BAT
echo off
cls
what s "Password (Use upper or
  lower case only, not a
  mixture): "
if $%WHAT%==$YOUKNOW goto ok
if $%WHAT%==$youknow goto ok
:notok
echo The password was incorrect
echo Password Incorrect. Press
  something.
  pause >nul
rem Use either RESET or
  REBOOT depending on which
  one you have for the next
rem line.
rem If you have neither, make
  the batch file re-run by
  using \PASSRUN.BAT.
reset
:ok
cls
echo The password was
  correct.
set what=
rem You could now goto DOS by
  just putting \COMMAND or run
  Windows like below.
set temp=c:\
cd windows
win
cd\
reboot
```

If you use this, it will ask you for a password on boot-up. You CANNOT press CTRL-C to break out because this will simply lock your computer up (as the /P switch with Command.Com means that if the process is stopped, the operating system cannot EXIT back any further). Therefore, if you do use the above routine, make a note of your password.

Of course, the password file could be read by a word-processor (there are two ways around this, one is easy, the other is hard) but I do not have enough space to explain this now.

Unfortunately, some users may then run out of Environment space, which is only a relatively tiny amount of memory. Users with DOS 3.3 or above can therefore put this line into their CONFIG.SYS:

SHELL=C:\COMMAND.COM /

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P /E:XXXX /c progto.run

The /C progto.run is optional, (it is used in the above password routine), without out it you will simply be landed in DOS. Beware however, the /C switch must be the last switch used after Command.Com as it takes the next piece of information as a filename.

The /E:XXXX is the real nice juicy bit. This allows you to specify, in bytes, the amount of Environment space you want reserved in DOS. This is handy if you are using the PROMPT $e for escape sequences in DOS. If you have the WHAT program this can also be used to find out the above.

If you ever want to get rid of any environment parameter just at the dos prompt type

C:\>set param=

to get rid of the <param>.

How Executive can you get?

Some people I know (like myself for instance) still prefer the good old MS-DOS Executive system as supplied with Windows 2 rather than the Windows 3 Program Manager. If you want to run MS-DOS Exec, (it is still supplied with Windows 3) simply either do <FILE> <RUN> MSDOS. However, if you can't stand the sight of Program Manager, you can scrap it completely. In your Windows directory you will find the file SYSTEM.INI. Make a backup of it first (e.g. COPY SYSTEM.INI SYSTEM.OLD). Then, using Notepad, change the line which says SHELL=PROGMAN.EXE to SHELL=MSDOS.EXE. Close down Windows and then restart it to see the new shell. Simple! (Well, that is what it is supposed to be, but, as all Network Managers know, a lot of the times simple in theoretical terms means unbelievably impossible in practical terms!)

Incidentally, having made the backup file how do you use it if things go wrong? Quit Windows (if it started at all) and then COPY SYSTEM.OLD SYSTEM.INI to get back to where you were.

It's Allwrite on the bright

Allwrite (from ILECC) has always struck me as a good program. It is quite easy to use and the printouts, even on an aging grotty old 9-pin Epson RX are remarkably clear and easily readable. The program displays the keyboard (as you see it) and what special character from the language each key stands for (e.g. Circumflexes other accents and the german double S letter (ß). Programs like FlexiWrite can do this but the ALT ASCII code business is not very user friendly. With Allwrite, however, the screen is well spaced. The program works best with a mouse, but the commands can all be used from the keyboard with the F-KEYS and the other keys. Allwrite uses an INI file to remember what language typeface you are in; this can be a bit difficult for standalone users when the department uses it for two languages (say French and German) but does not want to re-configure the program each time on startup. Therefore a menu can be constructed to copy different versions of the INI files to the program directory so that Allwrite starts in the language you want (the one you selected from th menu).

The symbols standing for the different commands on the main screen could have been made a little clearer, but on the whole Allwrite offers an attractive option for language departments who wish to produce unique international characters. Allwrite supports many different international languages and is well worth considering for its relatively low price.

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Amazing Fact

Okay, you are one of those real "organized" people who use Windows 3. It also happens that you use your 286 (Did you know that they have to put the "i" before 486 because Intel cannot Copyright just a number - therefore i486!) with 16MB memory. However, you've just installed into memory as many programs into memory as possible but then Windows won't run properly. Why?

It so happens that Windows is so unfriendly (A program that is "user executable" can have two meanings!) that it will not run very well (or not at all) if you have less than 15% of system resources free. This means that if you had 16MB of memory (about 16384 KBytes) but only had say 2MB of memory free when you ran Windows, Windows would feel very sick when it ran. This is because even though 2MB would be more than enough to run Windows normally, 2MB is only about 12.5% of the total system resources! So, it doesn't really how much totall memory you have, but how much of it is spare!

If anybody wants any help with some problem or other, please phone me on (0491) 577149. I specialise in the PC186 but I can also deal with most problems on the 480z and the Chain Network, RM Net and an assortment of software including things like PageMaker and WinWord. I can also manage most things on the X/M Series and the new S Series. Well, that's about it for this edition of Tech Tips. Happy Computing!

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Henrietta's Book of Spells

Mary Mabey

Fed up with those awful arcade games? Why not salve your conscience and buy an "educational" game which the whole family will enjoy?

"Henrietta's Book of Spells" is a spelling game with a difference. Aimed at 8-13 year olds it has all the requirements for hours of fun. There are bright graphics, a friendly frog waiting to be turned into a prince, addictive sound effects, **and an educational purpose!**

It is possible for parents to control the level of difficulty both for the length of the words and the time allowed to solve them. The spelling can be from anagrams, missing vowels, missing consonants etc. You can even play hangman with a nasty skeleton lurking in the corner for the less skilful. Those who solve problems fast enough get credits towards solving the magic word which frees the prince from his frog disguise. This is hardly an improvement -he must be just about the most ugly prince ever to grace a computer screen!

The programme varies from a novice level of 5 letter words such as "happy" and "whale" to the advanced 9 letter teasers like "jewellery" and "xylophone." I must admit to being floored myself by "Zirconium" when it was displayed as an anagram ! However this is an exception and most of the vocabulary is well within the grasp of the average 10-12 year old.

My own 14 year old daughter has become addicted to this as light relief from her GCSE work. She wanted a version in German or French and we are now working on this together as it is possible to change the lists of words included in the programme. Unfortunately each word list is restricted to words of a uniform length. This inability to use words of varying lengths means you cannot restrict the foreign word lists to specific vocabulary listings such as 'travel' or 'food' very easily. Neither can you leave a gap after the article.-" La maison" can only be input as "lamaison" which is a pity.

Still it's a very versatile programme and as you can see it can give you endless fun if you also try to change the word listings and language. What's more, your children could learn some computing skills if they are involved in rewriting the vocabulary lists like my daughter. You will be pleased to learn that the programme very kindly sorts the lists into alphabetical order for you so you merely select the basic vocabulary and type them into the original template. [Make sure to copy the original word files first so that you can go back to the original listings at a later date].

One word of warning-**don't mislay the user notes** which come with the disk because they contain the user ID words. Even memorising them will not work as they change every time you log on! Lose the sheet and you could be most unpopular!

Mary Mabey is the Resource Centre Manager at Bacon's College on 071 237 1928.

The software is available from:

Scetlander, 74, Victoria Crescent, Glasgow, G12 9JN,

Tel. 041 357 1659. Fax 041 357 5034.

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item

products for Windows

Self-instructional Guides

- ❑ **Opening Windows** - a Windows 3 primer
- ❑ **Excel** (version 2, validated for use with version 3)
- ❑ **Word for Windows** (version 1)
- ❑ **Word for Windows** (version 2)
- ❑ **Works for Windows**
- ❑ **Superbase** (version 1.2, validated for version 1.3)
- ❑ Under development: **Excel 4, Access, PageMaker 4**

Price: £6.00 each
(except Superbase - £9.00 including disc of prepared files)

Software: WindowBox

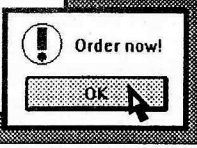
- ❑ Local network electronic mail for Windows: send notes and documents, create mailing lists, place messages for all to see on the bulletin board

Price: £75.00 (£50.00 if you already have ITEM Mailbox)

Activity Pack: Europa

- ❑ Integrated project material for English, Geography, Modern Languages, BIS and IT for KS3, KS4 and GNVQs in Business Studies and Travel & Tourism

Price: £30.00



Available from: ITEM, ILECC, John Ruskin Street, LONDON SE5 0PQ
Tel: (071) 735 9123 Fax: (071) 587 1385

Educational Computing Services provided by the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

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Superbase 4 - A self instructional guide

Steve Rochford

This is the latest in the series of guides to Windows applications to come from ITEM and very welcome it is too. The book is accompanied by a disc which contains a set of sample files which are used by the book. This is an excellent idea, saving a lot of time keying in the amount of data which is really needed to use Superbase fully. The book starts with an introduction which tells you how to get started on either a standalone machine or a network; the latter is best given to the network manager to set up but it is not difficult to do. Superbase is a relational database and the book uses this term early on but doesn't press it; there are many A level students who find the concept of relational databases (where a key field in one record is used to find more information in another file) quite difficult. This would be a good introduction for them.

The book then gets you to load a file of information about major cities of the world and takes you through the panel controls at the bottom of the screen. The explanations are clear and easy to follow and the description of the difference between using a filter and searching for a key is good. The next step is to load a pre-defined form to look at the same file. This gives a good feel for what can be achieved with a simple looking form. The buttons at the bottom of the screen have been replaced by ones labelled with text. The book points out that these may be more or less meaningful than the symbols; if the user does not speak English then the symbols are likely to be better. The form has two pages to it and the buttons give access to external fields such as coloured maps of the countries and extensive data on the cities (incidentally, the map files are named in the country's own language hence östreich.pcx for Austria). The book takes you through using the facilities offered by the form but I am sure that if you were using this in class you could spend ages just reading the data.

The data in the files is not complete so the next step is to see how Superbase is used to add data to a file. This section explains how you can use Page View to make the screen easier to work with; particularly useful when some fields are very short and others are long. It also shows how Superbase's text editor is used to add the external text fields (in my opinion this has to be the most non-standard Windows editor I have ever met. I always try and avoid it if I can but the book said use it so I did. It does the job but it could be much better!) Lookup fields are then

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explained; when you are filling in a new city it must be in one of the countries which already exist (if this was a "real" system what this means is that you would fill in the details of a new country before you added details of its cities - not at all unreasonable).

Adding and deleting records is covered next (Yugoslavia is deleted and an appendix details how to add the constituent countries) and then the process of changing the file structure is covered. The ease with which you can change the structure of a file is one of the strong points of Superbase. The book gives a good explanation of each of the field types available and describes when you might use them. In the example, the population density is changed to be a calculated field, derived from the population and area of the country.

The next section of the book deals with creating files. Again, the system is a two file system. The files to be created here concern jazz musicians and the instructions for setting them up are the only ones with which I would disagree. Superbase gives you the facility for creating files which are password protected. Although this is a good idea for confidential files I have seen too many pupils forget passwords to recommend this. (It is possible to recover data which is locked in a password protected file but it's not easy). The book doesn't just tell you what fields to include but also explains how the types are chosen; very useful. The first file to be created will contain the details of the musicians and the second simply lists instruments which they play (it is used as a lookup table). Data for the records is given in the book and a set of images is installed on the disc so that you can have pictures of the musicians.

Now it's on to Form Designer. The guide does a good job of explaining how to use this and I learned some new things from it (Superbase was an early Windows program and I presume was designed by people who hadn't really seen what the interface on a good Windows program should look like. It's perfectly competent at doing its job but it is rather idiosyncratic.) Most of the form designer's facilities are used and following through the exercise will give you a very good idea of how to use the program. When you are finished you have a form which not only has normal fields but external fields (pictures and text) and command buttons.

Once the jazz form has been finished more work is done on the cities form. I found this rather confusing but perhaps I shouldn't have tried to work through the whole book in one go! This explains how you can make a field from more than one file appear on the same form and is quite useful.

The last major section of the book deals with producing reports. Reporting in Superbase is very flexible and this chapter tries to show some of the features available. It starts with simple reports and shows how they

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can be adjusted to give a better appearance and then goes on to show how groups and totals can be included. The only problem I found here was nothing to do with the book; I find that Superbase handles proportional fonts very badly and you are better to use a font like courier if you want all the columns to line up properly.

Finally the book explains how you can import and export data; here the age of Superbase really shows. Although it handles Excel files it only works with version 2 and only dBASE III is handled. Again, this isn't ITEM's fault and if you are working with PC186s then it's not a problem at all.

One of the things that I was pleased with is the way the book uses a database first and then goes into the process of creating one. This is the way I've always taught the subject; there doesn't seem to be much point in trying to get pupils to create something which they've never seen.

I would recommend this package to anyone wanting to learn about using Superbase. It explains almost everything you would need to know about using the package and the examples it uses are easy for most pupils to understand (one of the problems with the manual is that most of the examples are based on company structures which are totally unfamiliar to children). It costs £9.00 and is available from ITEM at ILECC, John Ruskin Street, London SE5 0PQ Tel: 071 735 9123.

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Micro Mart

Wanted:

PC386 with hard drive and colour monitor; will buy suitable printer as well, if available.

Please contact:

Stan Vines on 081 441 6211 (day) or 0923 856451 (evening)

For Sale:

PC186 (84 key) with colour monitor and dual floppy drives, mouse, serial piconet module and serial printer cable. Software includes MS DOS 3.1, Word, PaintSPA, NewSPAper and many others, all complete with manuals.

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Please contact:

Shahnwaz Hoosein on 071 241 1342.

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Ken Maynard at 7 Wood Drive Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 8PA tel: 0438-354809

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10 PC186 Nimbus PC186, Colour Monitors, 1Mb Memory, IBM boards, Z Net interface. £200 each

10 480z L4 (HRG, 64k memory, network interface) and dual 8" floppy based server. **Very very cheap**

5 Z Net cards for AX computers

Contact Lyndon Evans on 0685 7233663

Wanted:

The following keys for the 480z computer

1 each of CTRL R C X N Z [; , . SHIFT REPEAT Space bar

2 of V

Also 55 springs are required. Is anybody able to help?

Please contact:

Christine McLintock, Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Chesham Road, Amersham Buckinghamshire, HP6 5HA

Tel: 0494 721685

Wanted:

Students in distress! Any unwanted software for a Nimbus PC186 or that will run under SETPC. Also desperately wanted a Data Communications Card or Serial Piconet Module. I need one of these for a dongle which plugs into an RS232C port. Please contact Stephen Sharrad at 10 Gainsborough Hill, Henley on Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 1ST Tel: 0491 577149

For Sale:

30 Z Net cards for AX/2. Removed from computers on recent conversion to Novell Netware. Contact

JR Kelly at CM Maddin & Co, 6 Claremont Road, Surbiton, Surrey, KT6 4RA. Tel: 081 399 0051

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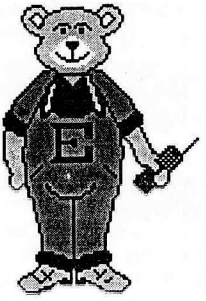

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RM Net LM version 1.1

Steve Rochford

It's now a year since RM Net LM was first shown at the Barbican at BETT 92 and version 1.1 has just been announced. As the version number suggests, it's not a major update in terms of the facilities it provides but the way in which you implement and the way in which it is now designed to be supported as part of a total package has changed. There has also been some rationalisation of the range of products; it is now not possible to buy anything other than a SystemBase for use on Net LM. Given the expansion potential of the SystemBase compared to a VX this makes sense but it obviously adds to the cost. The possible configurations of a system are also now more clearly stated, together with a statement of where they expect to go in the future (for example, 1Gb is currently the largest hard drive supported on a server but this will increase; only 1 domain is supported on a system but this may change in the future).

RM now produce a pack called Implementing an Educational Network and if you are about to do this then contact RM to get a copy. Much of what follows is either based on the contents of that pack or is my opinion of what is happening.

The past year has been pretty hectic for RM in terms of installing network products; Net LM has been their most successful product in terms of sales and much has been learnt from it. When I placed my order last year it seemed to be simply a case of choosing the bits I wanted from the catalogue, filling in my order, sending it off, waiting for the boxes to arrive and then plugging everything in. Of course, it didn't turn out to be quite like that. RM now realise that most schools will need much more help than before; Net LM is a much more sophisticated package than any previous network they have sold and needs more careful planning if it is to work properly. To this end they now recommend a detailed planning stage and, preferably, a phased implementation. They suggest that the initial system should comprise no more than 1 server with up to 2 segments, a maximum of 32 stations and should use a server based printer. Once experience has been built up in using this it will then be possible to move from here, developing the system either in an incremental fashion or along a fast track. The former method allows more time for developing management skills with the system in a non-critical environment and will allow the system manager to bring applications into use on the system as and when they feel ready. This mimics the way in which many schools will have built up there Net 3 system; perhaps starting many years ago with a PC186 server running Net 1, then perhaps an AX with Net 2 and finally a VX and Net 3. Each change was essentially evolutionary and introduced no major new ideas. The change to Net LM, although it may not seem very different, is actually an enormous step. The operating system on the server is totally new and the way in which Lan Manager controls access to the system is totally different. RM now strongly recommend that system managers attend their training courses and they must attend courses to at least advanced level. New courses cover the use of multiple servers and advanced support for managers whose

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system must be available all the time.

Once the system has been delivered the support does not end. Included in the system price is one year's support at basic level which can be upgraded to standard level. Net LM 1.1 makes few changes in the level of support offered but does clarify some issues. In particular, users are now allocated a number of call units per year. Basic support entitles the user to 70 units and standard support to 125 units per year (one unit is 5 minutes long). I can see that this is being done to cut down unnecessary calls but last week, for example, I spent 20 minutes on the phone with what I thought were two simple queries (why does Sytos crash when I schedule a backup and how do I stop the printer giving out a blank page between print jobs). I didn't get the answer to either query in that time (although I think that a return call from RM solved the first; the firmware on my Ultrastor card needed changing). This isn't the first time that I've called and not got an answer to my query. I hope that RM will work like BT's directory enquiries and make no "charge" for calls where they cannot supply an answer!

RM are also setting up a special bulletin board for use by standard support subscribers. If this is managed well then it should provide an excellent means of support for users although given the way in which RM have been supplying regular updates and bulletins so far I wonder if it will provide much more.

RM have always been able to install networks for users but the network commissioning now available goes much further than before. It is now possible not just to set up the stations and printer but also to create user accounts, set up Windows desktops and install non RM supplied applications. If you have more than one server then RM will also take care of making sure that the two servers are talking properly to each other and that everything works properly under load (and this last is vital; many network systems will appear perfect when no-one is using them but fall over as soon as real people use and abuse the system).

PC 186

Many users of PC186s have found that the first release of Net LM was not exactly ideal. RM have recognised this and have now made a number of significant changes to the system. The most important of these is that users upgrade to Ethernet. This is obviously not cheap but those users who have made the change have found it to be well worthwhile. The alternative is to not upgrade to Net LM for the 186 machines but to keep the Net 3 (or earlier) server with the 186s and use the new server for new machines. In order to help users make the change, RM have made some special offers on the cost of Ethernet cards and will also loan cards to users so that they can try them out. A further suggestion is the use of DOS logon for the PC186 which will speed up the start up procedure, particularly if you are not intending to use Windows programs. This whole thing is obviously a compromise. RM do seem to be trying hard to support the users who have still got 186s (and because they were well made they will still be around for a while yet) but there's a limit to what can be

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done. RM have said that they will continue to support Net 3.1 for the time being so that users with mainly 186s will probably feel that this is the best way to go. It is possible to attach new 486 stations to Net 3 (although an upgrade to Net 3.1A is necessary for this) and because these are fitted with the multi-protocol boot ROM it's straightforward to swap them to Net LM if you decide to upgrade in the future.

It's also not now recommended that you upgrade a VX 486 to run Net LM; RM will do this for you but say that the cost will be similar to that of buying a new SystemBase and keeping the VX as a station.

Cabling

Cabling used to be a case of just sticking a T piece on the back of a machine and running a length of cable to the next machine. In the days of 480z and then PC186 computers this was generally fine; the connections might not have been very good but the computers sent out relatively few packets so the occasional extra collision didn't matter. With fast stations running Windows on Net LM the situation changes. Both the stations and the server are now putting a large number of packets onto the cable and it is vital that they all get through without undue collisions. (Many of you will now RM's Nettest program. This gives a number which indicates the speed of data transfer along the cable. For my 386 stations on a VX486 server running Net 3.1 the best figure was about 3.5. On Net LM it is 14). For some time RM have recommended that you either pay them to install cabling or get another professional to do the job who has the equipment to test the cable properly. This is obviously expensive and in a bid to make the whole thing easier RM have now introduced a Modular Cabling System. The basic idea is that you design a system according to clearly laid out guidelines, send it off to RM for checking. Assuming you have got it right then you just buy the parts, plug them all together and, hey presto, one perfect cabling system. If you order the parts from RM then you don't even have to pay for the checkup; if you don't then it costs £99 (which probably wipes out any saving you might make by buying the parts elsewhere unless you are buying a huge system).

The idea seems excellent; the guide takes you through every stage from getting a plan of the building through to the final installation. It's not cheap but then no decent cabling system will be. RM suggest you allow about £50 per outlet. This may seem steep compared with the cost of a T piece and 2 BNC plugs but it's comparable to AMP Thinnet Taps (about £15 for the wall socket and £30 for a fly lead) and has the same benefit of not causing the entire system to crash when someone unplugs a connector.

All considered, RM seem to have put a huge effort into making sure that anyone buying a network from them now will get all the support they need to make sure that the system will provide top quality computing facilities. I hope that it all works.

The picture on page 36 is taken from advert sent to me by Intel for a network management product. Apart from the fact that I can't hide under my desk it accurately refects my feelings for much of the time while installing Net LM!

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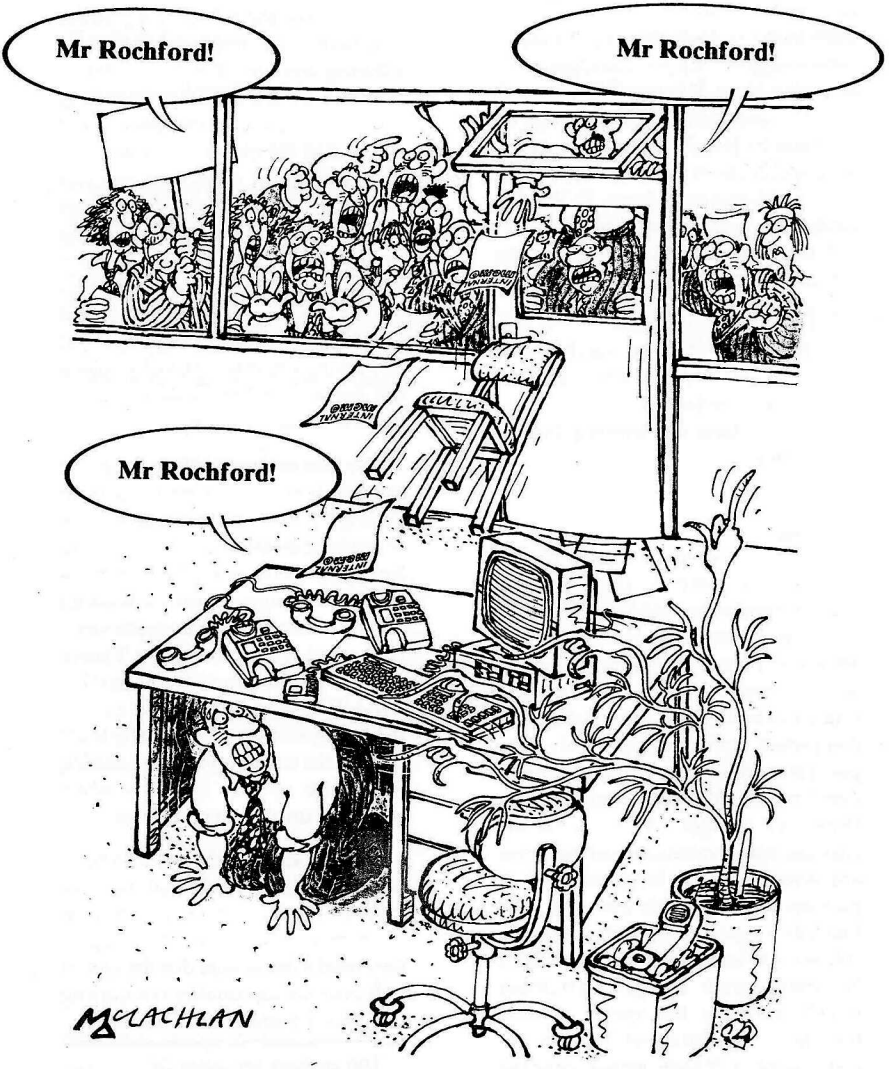

Deep down, Mr Rochford knew there was a better way of dealing with his network problems.

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Hints and Tips

Using drive T: on Net LM

Drive T: is used as a temporary drive on Net LM. Windows will store temporary files there and the files used to create the desktop (ie the *.GRP and *.INI files) are also stored there. The drive is specific to a station (rather than a user) and is created each time the station boots. There is nothing to stop you copying files there for temporary use by a user. For example, if you have a program which needs users to have read-write access to its files then you can either set up a special share on the server, which then can cause problems with sharing violation errors or, if the files are sufficiently small then you can copy them across to drive T and access them there. One application which I know should run from drive P is Touch 'n' Go (a typing tutor) To use this I created the following MTSL

```
REM Touch 'n' Go
chdsk T:
cd T:\
copy p:\lib\touch\*.*
execmin t.exe
chdsk n:
```

The files are so small that they copy very quickly. It would be more elegant to delete them at the end of the script but I know that they will go as soon as the station is next rebooted so this doesn't cause a problem.

Superbase is an example of a program which must have read-write access to files (even when you open them for Read-Only access; this is because it writes to a lock file which is used to indicate to others what you are doing.) One way to make this work is to have the files on drive P: (perhaps in a drive called DATA). As ADMIN you must set the access rights for this directory to be RW for *USERS instead of the default RX. Run Superbase (its MTSL is called MSB4W) and open the file for shared access in read write mode for you and read only mode for other users. Now reset your machine without closing Superbase (make sure that you don't have any other applications open!) When another user comes to open this file they will not be able to open it in anything other than shared, read-only mode (because the lock file says that ADMIN has the file open and has locked it for read only access for other users). Use the OPEN FILE CLEAR "name" command if you do need to clear the locks at sometime.

The easier alternative is to set up different icons for Superbase, each of which represents a different datafile. The MTSL will look exactly like the standard one but will contain an extra line to copy the data file and its indices across to drive T:. To make sure that on this occasion Superbase starts on drive T: you can add the MTSL line:

```
setini win.ini [Superbase] start=t:\
```

This adds a line to WIN.INI and tells Superbase to change to drive T:

Word for Windows

If you've got Word for Windows and Excel 4 you may have noticed that they use separate spell checkers, each of which takes up several hundred kilobytes. In fact they don't need to. Start Word for Windows and choose Tools Options Win.ini. Find the MS Proofing Tools entry and change the Spelling Option to have the setting

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```
C:\WINDOWS\MSAPPS\PROOF\MSSPELL.DLL,
C:\WINDOWS\MSAPPS\PROOF\MSSP_BR.LEX
```

where all this fits on one line. The disadvantage is that you cannot have exclusion dictionaries (where you have words that must be flagged as wrong, even if they are in the main dictionary) but the saving in disc space is probably worth it. (The files to delete when you are sure it works are in the WINWORD directory and are called SP_BR.LEX and SPELL.DLL)

Word for Windows version 2 comes with a filter that allows it to read version 1 documents. On a network with both 186 and other machines it's quite possible for a user to create a file using version 2, save it, go to a PC 186 and try to load it, only to find garbage on the screen because the file is not recognised. RM network users are obviously not the only people to have problems with this because Microsoft now have a filter available which allows version 2 files to be read with version 1. Contact them on 0734 271000 .

Word for Windows can generate a table of contents automatically and with no real work on your part. As you are typing your work make sure that you highlight chapter headings and sub-headings using the pre-defined styles called Heading 1, Heading 2 etc. When you are done, move to where you want the table to go and choose Insert Table of Contents. Make sure that *Use Heading Paragraphs* is selected, click OK and watch Word go. When it has finished you will find that the list of styles now includes TOC1, TOC2 etc. If you don't like the way the table is laid out then change the styles and rebuild the table.

Image Handling

Norden Software sell a variety of useful programs for image management, particularly for the PC186. They also sell a scanner for all Nimbus computers which does not require any special interface. It costs £449). Contact them at 33 Norden Way, Rochdale OL11 5TD Tel: 0706 521578

Help wanted

Does anybody know how to use DR DOS / Superstor / Desqview 386 multi tasker but still allow PC 186 mode to work. If you do please write to the editor. I think that it's not possible (because of the way PC186 mode uses high memory) but I'd love to be proved wrong!

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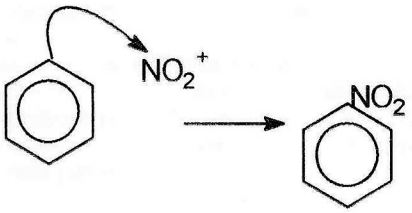
ChemWindow

Steve Rochford

ChemWindow is a drawing program specifically tailored to the needs of chemists. It works in two main modes, reports and presentation; the only difference being the size and "boldness" of the diagrams produced.

When the program starts you are presented with a blank screen with a typical Windows toolbox down the left hand side. Most of the icons have obvious functions to anyone who needs to draw chemical formulae (and many years ago I did a degree in Chemistry so it all came flooding back!).

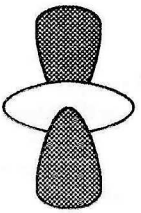


It's very easy to get started and this is helped by the addition of a "help pane" at the top of the drawing area which tells you what the various tools are doing as you drag or click. This is very useful because the same tool can have different effects depending on what you do and whether you are holding down shift, ctrl or alt at the same time.

Typing simple formulae is straightforward because the program allows you to highlight a block of text and tell it that it has a formula style. ChemWindow then works out the necessary subscripts and superscripts; a massive time saving compared to using the equation editor in Word or trying to type it by hand.

H_2SO_4

H_3O^+



The program includes a number of common molecular structures (and to encourage you to register a disc containing a huge number of structures is sent to you when you send off the registration card).

The package supports the full range of functions you would expect. You can change the size and font for text and you can create styles; these specify not just things like the size of text but also the length of a normal bond. You can group things together or align them so that they look tidy.

Drawing diagrams is all very well but useless if you can't do anything with them. ChemWindow supports the full range of Windows printers but, more importantly, allows you to export the diagram in a variety of formats, including Windows Metafiles which can then be picked up in most other Windows programs (including Word and PageMaker).

So what's bad about it? It won't run on a PC186 (because it needs either Adobe Type Manager or Windows 3.1 True Type Fonts) but it will work on any other Nimbus. The other bad point is the price; it costs £400 (but is available to Education at a mere £200). Contact Simnetts for further details.

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Your Magazine

Many thanks to all those of you who have written articles for the magazine in the past but now it's time to re-emphasise that without you there is no magazine. I quite enjoy putting the magazine together and I'm always happy to take anything you send me and polish it up if you think that it's not quite good enough for publication but if I don't get any articles then you don't get a magazine!

I really do welcome items for the magazine from anyone. You don't have to be a great writer to send something in; send a letter or a short tip for the Hints and Tips pages, everything is welcome. If you want to phone and talk something over then please do; even if you aren't sure how to write something down then I can always include your ideas in Hints and Tips or as a plea for help.

I would be particularly pleased to hear from the people who are using RM computers at home; there are quite a lot of you out there. Some of you will be experienced at working with computers and I would be interested to know why you chose RM for home use. Others will have responded to RM's advertising, perhaps because your children use the same computers at school. How are you getting on with your new machine? Did you have any problems getting started? It doesn't matter if you still don't know the answer to the problem- this is how you'll find out - and it doesn't matter if you think that your problem was trivial; remember that there are many other people who are going to be in exactly the same position as you and will welcome the help that you can give.

If you are writing for me then the ideal is to send me a disc produced using Word or Word for Windows but I can cope with any word processor that runs on a Nimbus (I think). If what you are sending is short then a letter on good old fashioned paper is fine.

Finally, we pay for published articles at the rate of £5 per printed page

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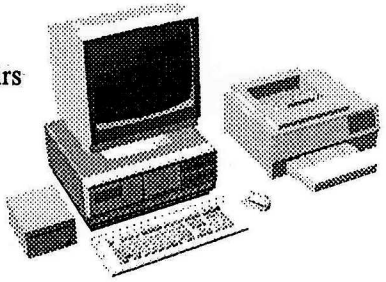
* Selection of Response Times
* 53 Manufacturers Supported - (micro PCs and peripherals)



A TEAM TO BE TRUSTED

Call our Sales Dept for further details:

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